

WVCW's shift to cable radio boosts range, audience

by Maliya Reed
staff writer

Last fall Virginia Commonwealth University radio station WVCW began broadcasting on Continental Cable radio. The move ended the radio station's 25-year history of being heard only by a few people each day.

Now, all those who subscribe to cable radio in the cities of Richmond and Ashland and in Henrico, Hanover and Goochland counties receive the broadcast on 105.3 FM.

Technically, WVCW is by itself when compared to other radio stations on cable radio because it has a direct link to Continental Cablevision that transmits the broadcast. All other frequencies transmit through air waves.

"We have a unique set-up as opposed to any other station," said Mike Friedman, station engineer. "We're supposedly the cleanest radio station on cable ... we're not the loudest, though."

Cable radio has increased the listening audience of WVCW "dramatically," said Friedman.

Before cable radio, WVCW used a carrier-current system that transmits through electrical currents.

After replacing transmitters and hiring a part-time engineer, students, staff

and faculty eventually could hear broadcasts in the Hibbs Building, the University Student Commons and the three campus dormitories: Johnson, Rhodes and Gladding Residence Center.

"Carrier current doesn't sound very good because of the hum it gives from all the electrical grounding," Friedman said. "A lot of the students wouldn't

even listen because it didn't come in clear enough We have more listeners than ever now. It's a great improvement."

Since getting on cable radio, WVCW installed a blinking light so the disc jockeys know when a listener calls, a service they didn't use when the station transmitted only to campus.

WVCW broadcasts on cable from 7 a.m. to 1 a.m. seven days a week and wants to fill in the six empty hours of air time.

"We're already putting people in on the weekends. Just one or two have started — we're going to phase them in," said Max Ryder, general manager.

Paula Hersh, regional promotions manager of Continental Cable, said she is happy with the arrangement.

"We've had some positive comments about WVCW. People like their music and they like listening to them," she said. "College radio is an important resource

in cultivating new radio talent. We are glad to help them get a larger audience."

WVCW uses a modern rock format playing artists like The Cure, Jesus Jones and Big Audio Dynamite from the station's collection of about 200 CDs that make up 85 percent of its collection.

The disc jockeys, however, don't always stick to the original music.

"Even though we do have a format, we deviate from that sometimes," said Ryder. "We realize the university is very diverse and we have to keep up with that. We have dance shows — we've got everything."

Several students who operate the radio station have some professional experience. Some work for stations like XL102 and B103.

"You've got all these people here that work at other radio stations," Ryder said, "and we all have some aspect of professional training."

What's next for WVCW?

Ryder and Friedman agreed that cable radio is the first step of going to FM radio, but Ryder predicts going FM is at least two years away.

"We're over 25 years old now and we've been trying to go FM for a long time," Ryder said, "but for one reason or another it never happened."